Book Reviews

Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding. Cele C. Otnes & Elizabeth H. Pleck. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. 384 pp. ISBN 0-520-24008-1. $19.95 (paper).

Dreams, fairy tales, and other illusions. Cele Otnes, associate professor of business administration, and Elizabeth Pleck, professor of history and community development at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, have produced an impressive collaboration in their examination of "romantic love and excessive consumption" in that great taken-for-granted: the "lavish" wedding. Known by many as the white wedding tradition, this ritual and the meanings that we attach to the various aspects of its pervasive practice have, until recently, been largely unexamined by scholars (see note below for some examples of this work). Otnes and Pleck situate their extensive study in the context of earlier efforts examining the wedding, while attempting to leave no ring unturned in extending the reach of wedding scholarship. One of the most significant contributions that this book makes to the growing body of wedding research is the authors' marriage of the disciplines of business and history. In exploring the object of their affection—the lavish wedding—Otnes and Pleck demonstrate the value of discussion for the success of a good marriage. The rich analysis they provide makes use of both theory and method from their respective disciplines, while infusing their findings with insights offered by other disciplines (e.g., sociology and anthropology). Scholars can learn a great deal from the authors' collaborative efforts because they demonstrate the incisive value of interdisciplinary work. In the end, their examination of the lavish wedding provides strong evidence about the marketing and meaning-making practices surrounding the production of the lavish wedding.

From a sociological standpoint, the chapters that focus on marketing are particularly interesting, given the role of business and marketers in creating what develops and becomes socially constructed as tradition. Otnes and Pleck's work on the investment of business and markets reveals the ideological underpinnings of the lavish wedding and how powerfull advertisers' messages are in naturalizing social relations. For example, Otnes and Pleck further debunk the tradition of the diamond engagement ring by linking the history of its evolution with the extraordinarily effective marketing campaigns that naturalized its necessity: "… what really caused the tradition of diamond engagement rings to take off was … a marketing campaign as brilliant as the gemstones themselves" (p. 62).

In addition to the role of marketing, they mention the powerfully oppressive role of race and colonialism in the history of the lavish wedding. The development of the diamond industry and its reliance on the oppression of Boer men, women, and children, and African (often Zulu) labor is made visible in their chapter "The Engagement Complex." Additionally, they mention the role of whiteness in the evolution of the white wedding gown as linked to white

supremacist beliefs in relation to Queen Victoria, as well as the white beauty ideal that escalated in the creation and consumption of the Barbie doll.

Additionally disturbing in their excavation of the production aspects of the lavish wedding is their description of the ways that marketers make use of the sacred to create desire for their products. "[R]etailers are aware that the public regards the wedding gown as a sacred item and have sought to combine profit making with the redesign of the bridal store as a quasi-sacred space" (p. 83). Their analysis of the exploitative practices of business in the production of cultural ritual gives the reader the opportunity to develop a critical consciousness regarding weddings and the powerful interests at stake in the selling of the lavish wedding.

Cinderella dreams of a day when her handsome prince will sweep her away into a happily-ever-after life, free from class and sex oppression and away from the abuses of the workplace. Otnes and Pleck's use of the Cinderella fairy tale throughout the book is significantly apt. They offer many examples of the way that this story is woven throughout the history of the lavish wedding, and offer insights into how it gives meaning to everything from the wedding gown to the Barbie doll. And, of course, the modern day Cinderella story is replayed over and over again in movies and popular culture, securing the illusion that the lavish wedding is necessary for guaranteeing the happy ending.

Overall, *Cinderella Dreams* is a powerful addition to a growing field of wedding scholarship. For years to come, many will refer to this work before making assertions regarding any of the historical origins of various wedding practices. Additionally, Otnes and Pleck have given us many options for additional research. For example, more needs to be done on the extensive labor abuses that the wedding industry has relied upon. The racialization of the wedding is also a topic of great importance, mostly because it reveals the politics of marriage in relation to white supremacist belief systems.

Cinderella Dreams provides us with remarkably radical insights into the development of the modern and now lavish wedding without relying on polemics. At the same time, it is critical that readers understand that what Otnes and Pleck have provided is an exposé about the ways that capitalism operates systemically to organize and define our social world—even our fairy tales.

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NOTE

Recent examples of this scholarship include Boden, Sharon. 2003. *Consumerism, Romance, and the Wedding Experience*. London: Palgrave MacMillan; Cox, Caroline. 2003. *I Do: 100 Years of Wedding Fashion*. New York: Watson-Guptill Pub.; Currie, Dawn. 1993 'Here Comes the Bride': The Making of a 'Modern Traditional' Wedding in Western Culture. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 24, 3: 403–421; Freeman, Elizabeth. 2002. *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Geller, Jaclyn. 2001. *Here Comes the Bride: Women, Weddings, and the Marriage Mystique*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows Press; Ingraham, Chrys. 1999. *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge; Oswald, Ramona Faith. 2000. A Member of the Wedding? Heterosexism and Family Ritual. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 17: 349–368.

Mate Selection Across Cultures. Raeann R. Hamon & Bron B. Ingoldsby (Eds.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003. 296 pp. ISBN 0-7619-2592-9. $34.95 (cloth).

In the introduction to *Mate Selection Across Cultures*, editors Raeann Hamon and Bron Ingoldsby identify the family as the fundamental unit of society, one that is universal even as the particulars of family organization differ. They are interested in one aspect of family life: mate selection. By compiling descriptions of couple formation from varying cultural backgrounds, they reveal the similarities and differences that this process takes.

The countries and regions covered in the book are North America: United States; Caribbean and South America: the Bahamas, Ecuador and Latin America, Trinidad and Tobago; Africa: Ghana, Kenya; Middle East: Egypt, Israel, Turkey; Europe: Spain, Netherlands; Asia: India, China, Japan.

As each chapter reveals, partner selection is tied to customs, rituals, and ceremonies that formalize the relationship. Fourteen countries are highlighted even though readers need to note that within countries are variations by religious, ethnic, and class positions. In that sense, this book is only a partial view of the diversity that exists around the world and within individual

countries. For instance, the first selection is titled "The Mate Selection Process in the United States" by coeditor Bron Ingoldsby. The mate selection process covered in this generic title begins with the Hutterite colony in Montana (as illustrative of the diversity of families in the United States), then goes on to provide an overview of changing practices and beliefs, from colonial Puritans to contemporary times, as though those practices could be generalized to most Americans.

In the chapters that follow, there is an overall lack of attention to dating and marriage for older people after death or divorce. Most articles do not mention divorce, remarriage, singlehood, gay and lesbian partnerships, childlessness, adultery, or premarital sex.

I would like to have seen analysis of customs rather than simply reporting on what those customs were. Polygyny, for one, could have been analyzed in a way that showed structural conditions conducive to its emergence rather than just seeing it as traditional practice. Clearly the most glaring omission, a gender analysis, is sorely needed. Dryly presented are reports that in Ghana, half of marriages are polygynous, and men make the decisions that affect women's lives (Baffour Takyi). Another instance is when authors Stephen Wilson, Lucy Ngige, and Linda Trollinger write about Kenya and how the failure of a woman to produce children leads to humiliation, shame, and sometimes justification for taking other wives, or for women to engage in a woman-to-woman marriage so another woman can carry the child a wife fails to produce. A second Kenyan example by the same authors relates that "circumcision" is required for both boys and girls to enter marriage, without distinguishing female genital mutilation from male circumcision.

Other interesting practices are undeveloped, such as the extreme separation of the sexes and common practice of arranged marriages in Egypt (Bahira Sherif-Trask), India (Nilufer Medora), and Turkey (Nuran Hortacsu). No mention is made by contributors Colleen Murray and Naoko Kimura of a photo of a reception banquet after a Japanese wedding that reveals men and women sitting at different long tables. It was unexpected to learn that only 67% of people in The Netherlands will marry during their life course, as compared with 90% in the early 1970s (Manfred H. M. van Dulmen)—and yet, no explanation beyond increased cohabitation rates is given. What is startling about this change is that so many will never marry, unlike other countries where cohabitation might be used as a trial marriage, or where cohabitation follows the failure of an earlier marriage.

The chapter on China by Yan R. Xia and Zhi G. Zhow provided an integrated history of social, political, and economic change, with strong emphasis on the transformation of women's status and other gender and family practices after the 1948 revolution. Chinese society has witnessed dramatic social transformation, from arranged marriages where a man could take more than one wife and a "chaste" wife would remain faithful to her husband, even after his death, to the promotion of gender equality and women's entry into the labor force with the Marriage Law of 1950, and no-fault divorce in 1980. Xia and Zhow integrate those massive intersectional forces with the mate selection topic of this collection, something other chapters do less well, if at all.

A summary by the two editors at the end of the book on the similarities and differences between cultures and subcultures would have been useful. Something more than "just the facts ma'am" would have added to this collection of cross-cultural practices on dating and marriage—such an important topic to be presented in such a bland manner.

There is value to this group of readings, particularly for people unfamiliar with other cultures. Recognition of different practices is a first step in developing a broadening consciousness, one that moves beyond the ethnocentrism engrained in unawareness and closed minds. Thus, it is useful to know basic facts of a selected number of ethnic, class, and caste groups around the world, including the visual view provided by wedding pictures in many of the selections. What is missing is complex comparative analysis—and feeling. It was disappointing to find a topic containing such strong emotions (even for those engaged in arranged marriages) presented in such a neutral tone.

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